Greetings from MIT
to our Alumni, Faculty, Staff, Parents and Friends!

1) Graduate students Jonathan Behrens, Kevin Slimore, and Zack Schiffer, with MIT Hillel's new Director of Graduate Student Engagement, Mikhail Reuven, at Grad Hillel's Sushi in the Sukkah event.

2) MIT Hillel's beautiful Sukkah that was decorated by students, led by Maya Levy '21.

3) Jesse Michel '19 joins his sister, Lisie Lillianfeld, and her husband, Robert, for lunch in the MIT Sukkah.

MIT Hillel Update

Yesterday we began the Jewish month of “mar Heshvan”. The word “mar” in Hebrew means “bitter”, and the modifier/epithet calls attention to the fact that there are no Jewish holidays throughout this month. In fact, from Sukkot until Chanukah, the Jewish calendar is empty. The High Holy Days are over. Sukkot is behind us. Simchat Torah has been celebrated, and the Torah begun to be read again from the beginning. Of course, this actually means that there are about six weeks now, when those of us who do Jewish communal work, can actually get our regular/mundane work and tasks done. After all the festivities, it’s a let down, perhaps. A sigh of relief, definitely. And, because the crunch and overload of the holiday season of the Jewish month of Tishrei is finished, I proudly wear a t-shirt that says “Rabbis ‘heart’ Heshvan”. It’s all a matter of perspective.

But, looking back just a bit on the past month, my favorite Jewish holiday is Sukkot. I love going from cerebral and introspective Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur, when we re-seek our best selves, to the physicality of building a sukkah, decorating a sukkah, cooking meals, and hosting people outdoors (when the rain in the Northeast holds up: Sukkot was definitely created for a different climate!).

Our students this year made good use of the holiday. Maya Levy ’21 led a group of students in spray painting decorations on the outer walls of the MIT Hillel sukkah on Kresge Oval. Grad students met for sushi in the sukkah. Hillel classes were held outdoors. The Student Board threw a “tent party”. Coffee and snacks were available in the sukkah all day during the week for those who came in for a study break. Many left classrooms, basement offices, cafeterias and spent time in the fresh air and “nature” (as much as the center of an urban campus can be designated “Nature”). These pictures show some of the joy.

And, now it’s regular life. Our staff has moved ahead beginning on-going classes; two Jewish Learning Fellowships are now in session, one with a new Israeli curriculum created by Rabbi Goldfeder, our Senior Jewish Educator, and being run by our Israeli Engagement Director, Shoshana Gibbor. Upperclassmen are continuing to greet freshmen who they met over Orientation Week and the Jewish holidays, and specific first-year programming is welcoming them to the community. Hillel’s free Shabbat dinners are crowded and a highlight of each week.

There is something to be said for calendars free from holidays.

Heshvan sameach/Happy Heshvan to all,

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM ’97
Executive Director, MIT Hillel
rabbif@mit.edu

Torah from Tech

2 Heshvan 5779
October 11, 2018

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Mentshn of Mention

Nathaniel Knopf ’19
nathanielknopf@gmail.com

Hi, my name is Nathaniel! I’m a senior at MIT majoring in Course 6-2 (Electrical Engineering and Computer Science) and concentrating in 21L (Literature). I grew up in the Bay Area in a town just to the north of San Francisco called Mill Valley.

Though my father is a Jew and my mother is a Protestant, I was raised in a predominantly secular household. My family would occasionally go to services on Friday nights, and more Passovers than not we would either host or attend a Seder – but beyond that we weren’t involved in the Jewish community, and religion was seldom a focus of our family life.

My first Friday night at MIT, I saw an advertisement for Shabbat dinner at Hillel in the freshman orientation booklet. From hearing my dad and his parents talk about our family history and religion, I knew enough to be aware that I was Jewish, but not much more than that. I was curious about what being a Jew actually meant in practice, so I decided, more or less on a whim, to attend Shabbat dinner.

Looking back, this was probably the best decision I made in my first weeks at MIT. Although I didn’t know a single one of the prayers, songs, or rituals, I quickly discovered that the Hillel community was warm, welcoming, and focused on making Jewish freshmen feel at home. I met many of the guys who soon became my fraternity brothers when I joined AEPi (where I have lived for three years and have served as rush chair,
Whiplash! Or, a uniquely Jewish application of Newton’s First Law—that is how I experience the arrival of the festival of Sukkot. Happy and sweet Roah Ha Shana celebrations give way to raw reflection through the Days of Awe, concluding with the darkest of imaginings on Kol Nidrei, complete with physical deprivation, promises of reform, and spiritual cleansing.

Then wham! In what feels like an instant, we are suddenly suffused with glee and energy, turning our attention immediately to creating—to engineering and building and decorating booths in which we are commanded to rejoice! Talk about an equal and opposite reaction...is it an accident that the words ‘feast’ and ‘fast’ are separated by only a single letter? From self-denial to festival, almost overnight! Watching the evident thrill of students, faculty, and staff as they gather in and around the sukkah, where days before they were light-headed and deprived as they broke their fasts, the obvious contrast is palpable.

The structures we erect on Sukkot are not only vessels for shelter and nourishment. The sukkah provides a special opportunity to practice the mitzvah of hachnasat orchim, the welcoming of community, opening our campus home to guests and sharing our traditions. God’s blueprints call for designs that allow us proximity to the heavens - to give thanks for our bounty - but perhaps also to contemplate our place in the firmament and, given the open-walled ‘feature,’ our impermanence as a Jewish people. Perhaps these rituals were, in fact, designed to bind and remind us how essential our connection to one another is to our history and our future.

Failing not long after students have returned to campus, I observe a certain unmistakable symmetry between the season of building and decorating these temporary but purposeful spaces and the process just completed in dorms and other living spaces across and around campus. Sukkot festivities are capped by the jubilation of Simchat Torah, when we read both the last verses of Deuteronomy and the first several of Genesis. We are flung with delight into another Jewish year, paralleling the excitement that accompanies the academic calendar launch, as each of us reimagines what is possible in our lives, our work and our worlds.

**MIT Hillel's 2019 Annual Fund**

**Add to Jewish life @ MIT!**

Crossworders and Scrabble players know that many names of Jewish holidays, months, and ritual items, as well as Yiddish words, are known and used commonly enough across the broader population to be deemed acceptable play. Unlike Scrabble, crosswords often use proper names, and when I saw 31 Down’s clue “Jewish campus group,” I didn’t hesitate to fill it in.

When I stopped the clock at 14:11 (not great for a Wednesday puzzle, I usually aim for 9 minutes), I knew the football answer but not how to spell Bob GRIESE, and I was also stymied by the phrase IN STIR even though I knew it was correct from its crossings). I took a few moments to reflect on what it means to be so widely recognized as the primary source of Jewish life on campus. Keep in mind that there are plenty of solvers of all faiths, and many in parts of the country where the Jewish population is not as prominent as here in Boston or other areas where MIT grads are likely to be represented in large numbers.

Yes, students looking at colleges can readily find ratings and rankings of Hillels across the nation. Yes, once on any of 300 US campuses, students know exactly where to find holiday services, kosher food, Birthright trips, and more. It can be nice to be considered a “given”, and it can also be the very factor that puts us at risk. We are thankful to our roughly 800 donors for ensuring that we have a stable base of annual support. As we grow our commitment to programming for graduate students, I would like to see that number grow to 1,000. A significant portion of reaching that goal is for occasional donors to commit to renewing every year.

Let us all make a habit of the things we do joyfully – from our hobbies like my crossword puzzle, to our small treats and luxuries in life, to our gifts and philanthropy.

Marla Choslovsky SM '88,
MIT Hillel Director of Development
marla360@mit.edu

Add your name to MIT Hillel's 2019 Donor Roll!

**Tamid Initiative - Planned Giving @ MIT Hillel**

We invite alumni and friends who care deeply about Jewish life at MIT to consider joining the Institute’s Katharine Dexter McCormick (1904) Society (KOMS) and be part of the Tamid Initiative by making a bequest to MIT, for the benefit of MIT Hillel. Your generosity will help MIT Hillel engage today’s students, securing our Jewish future with confidence.

**From the Archives!**

MIT Hillel has a rich history of programs and events told through student-made flyers, pamphlets, and great pictures!

The collection of MIT Hillel "artifacts" are now held in the Institute Archive and Special Collections for proper care and preservation.

**Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!**
MIT and MIT Hillel are eager to help you meet your objectives. For more information, please contact MIT Hillel Director of Development, Marla Choslovsky, marla360@mit.edu. To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly.

On the Calendar

NYC:
- Thursday, October 18 - Our annual "Leading Jewish Minds... On The Road" luncheon will be held at The Harmonie Club. Hosted again by Martin ’51 and Madge Miller. Featured speaker will be Arnold Barnett, the George Eastman Professor of Management Science and a Professor of Statistics at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

On Campus: Our Leading Jewish Minds seminar continues for a tenth year!
- Friday, November 9 - Professor Yossi Sheffi, Director of the Center for Transportation & Logistics, author of several best-selling and award-winning books.
- Friday, December 14 - Joseph F. Coughlin, founder and Director of the AgeLab at MIT.

Mazal Tov!
- Mazal tov to MIT alumni Chaim Kutnicki ’07 and Kayla Jacobs ’06 on the birth of their son Amitai, brother to Elior!

If you have life-cycle events to share with the MIT Hillel community, please let us know.

Norman B. and Muriel Leventhal Center for Jewish Life at MIT
40 Massachusetts Ave, Building W11
Cambridge, MA 02139

Your generous support allows us to help keep Jewish life vibrant on the MIT campus!